

Character Class

Wu Jen -- Eastern Magician

By Skip Williams



This column aims to provide players with tips on creating effective and interesting characters of various types. So whether you're a beginning player creating your very first character or an experienced gamer looking to put some punch into an old standby, this column is for you!

Assets

It's easy to think of the wu jen (from *Complete Arcane*) as just a wizard with some oriental flavor. The image is accurate as far as it goes, but it doesn't do the wu jen justice. A wu jen's approach to arcane magic offers considerable rewards when approached with the proper mindset.



The wu jen's main strength lies in her spells, but the class also offers several other potent resources. Here's a brief list of things you'll have going for you when you choose a wu jen:

- **High Skill Points:** A wu jen receives only two skill points per level (among the lowest in the game). Because Intelligence governs the wu jen's spellcasting, however, wu jen tend to have high Intelligence scores that give them many extra skill points.
- **Good Will Saves:** A wu jen uses the best progression for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This helps the wu jen resist most effects that attack or fool her mind or assault her spirit, such as charms, compulsions, illusions, fear, and even *inflict wounds* spells.

- **Good Spell Selection:** The wu jen spell list is a little different from the wizard's, but it has the same power and depth. Also like a wizard, a wu jen can learn any spell from the list (subject to the limits imposed by the wu jen's class level) and record it in a spell book.
 - Many wu jen spells have an elemental theme, but not the traditional four elements of the **D&D** game. Instead, the wu jen embraces five elements drawn from Eastern tradition: earth, fire, metal, water, and wood. Earth, fire, and water spells are familiar to most **D&D** players. Metal spells deal with weaponry, control over metal objects, and special effects with a metallic theme. Wood spells give the wu jen power over plants and also to shape, control, or enhance wood.
 - Not all wu jen spells fall into an elemental group, and a wu jen's spells are useful for a variety of things from blasting apart foes to controlling other minds to moving great distances instantly.
- **Bonus Feat:** At 1st level, a wu-jen receives a bonus metamagic feat.
- **Watchful Spirit:** Also at 1st level, a wu jen can gain paranormal insight that allows her to reroll one initiative roll each day.
- **Spell Secrets:** At 3rd, 9th, 12th, 15th, and 18th levels, a wu jen can select one spell she knows and alter it so that it always works as though modified with a metamagic feat taken from a short list given in the wu jen class description. The altered spell does not use up a higher-level spell slot, and the wu jen does not need to know the selected metamagic feat.
- **Elemental Mastery:** At 6th level, a wu jen chooses one of the five elements (see the section on spells) and becomes a master of that element. When casting a spell from the element she has mastered, her caster level for the spell increases by +2. In addition, a wu jen gains a +2 bonus on saving throws against spells from an element she has mastered.

Weaknesses

Wu jen must pay a price for their powerful spellcasting abilities. Here are a few things you'll consider when thinking about a wu jen character.

- **Low Hit Points:** The wu jen gains only 4-sided hit dice, which inevitably leads to a low hit point total.
- **Poor Armor Class:** The wu jen has no proficiency with any kind of armor or shield, so the character is fated to have low Armor Class. The combination of low hit points and low Armor Class makes a wu jen vulnerable to physical attacks such as swords, claws, and arrows. Even a gang of puny goblins poses a threat to a wu jen.
 - It's possible for a wu jen to become proficient with armor, but wearing armor can cause a wu jen's arcane spells to fail. A wu jen also can use spells to improve her defenses, but doing so drains her resources. A wu jen who wants to have a long and prosperous career must learn to stay out of harm's way.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** A wu jen's base attack bonus is +1 per two levels, which is the worst in the game. Wu jen don't do well with physical attacks.
- **Poor Reflex and Fortitude saves:** Wu jen have the worst progression for Reflex and Fortitude saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Wu jen aren't so great at avoiding attacks on their bodies.
- **Spell Books:** A wu jen must record every spell she knows into a spell book (or a set of spell books). As the

wu jen advances in level, she gains a small number of free spells to add to her books. She can add extra spells as she encounters them (or researches them on her own), but that takes time and money. A wu jen must study her spell books each day to prepare her spells. If she loses her books, she also loses her spellcasting ability until she can recover or replace them.

- **Taboos:** To maintain her magical abilities, a wu jen must abide by certain minor restrictions. If she violates a taboo, a wu jen cannot cast any spells for the rest of the day. A wu jen must choose one taboo at 1st level and one additional taboo each time she learns a spell secret.

Playing a Classy Wu Jen

Keep the following in mind to make your wu jen a memorable character who is an asset to her party.

Think Ahead

Great wu jen know they make their most important decisions before an adventure begins. Start with the contents of your spellbook. You choose the spells in your book, and it pays to consider them carefully. It's best if you include a mixture of offensive, defensive, and utility spells in your spellbook. Don't forget your spell secrets and elemental mastery class features. When adding a spell to your book, think of its potential for use with a spell secret.

You can use a spell secret to enhance a spell with any of these feats:

- **Enlarge Spell**, which is good for adding a little extra reach to any spell you aim at a distance, especially offensive spells;
- **Extend Spell**, which is good for defensive and utility spells that you want to keep running as long as possible;
- **Still Spell**, which is good for any spell you might want to cast while your movements are limited, especially spells that you might want to use to escape when you're trapped or grappled;
- **Silent Spell**, which is good for spells you might want to cast surreptitiously or when afflicted with a *silence* spell.

It also pays to stock up on spells of a single element so you can get the most mileage out of your elemental mastery power.

Once you've built your spellbooks, you still must choose spells for each adventure. Try to anticipate what you and your party will need during your adventure and select your spells accordingly.

You are among your party's most vulnerable members, so make sure you have a proper place in the party's marching order. In the middle is best, with at least one ally between you and your foes.

Remember Your Friends

Don't forget that your party relies on you to deal the decisive blow in most battles. Even if you can't win a battle with a single spell, your allies will count on you to wear the enemy down with a steady spell assault or do something else that provides them with a winning edge.

You'll fail in your crucial role if you become too concerned with your own safety. Stick close to the action so you can bring your spells to bear on the problem at hand. Try to have defensive spells cast and running before a fight starts rather than fiddling around with them while allies are fighting and taking damage without magical support from you. When you face a physical threat you can't handle, look to your friends for protection rather than fleeing the scene -- it's hard to affect an encounter when you aren't there. What's worse, there's no guarantee you won't run into something just as bad, or worse, if you leave your allies behind.

The Party's Vanguard: These characters include fighting types such as fighters, samurai, and paladins; it also includes quick and stealthy characters such as monks, rogues, and rangers. They handle most of the party's heavy, physical chores. They carry the fight to the enemy with melee ranged attacks, break down doors, and haul away the spoils of victory. In battle, you can count on them to form a fighting line, and it's always a good idea to keep the fighting line between you and your foes. Be ready to support those characters with spells that can kill or damage. Your intervention can keep your party's fighting line from being overwhelmed by a sudden attack or unexpectedly tough opponent. When casting spells, be careful to aim them so your friends aren't caught in their destructive effects. Nothing wears out your welcome faster than misaimed spells that hurt friends as well as foes.

Stealthy characters in the vanguard often will move ahead of the group to check for hidden dangers or root out hidden enemies that you can defeat with your spells. Be ready to react when a party scout uncovers something. Keep in mind that scouts often need a quick rescue. Be ready to come to a scout's aid when necessary.

Other Spellcasters: You probably aren't the only spellcaster in your party, so don't act as though you are. Divine spellcasters such as clerics and druids have potent spells, too, but their spells are different from yours. Avoid selecting spells that duplicate what those characters can do. This is equally important when another arcane spellcaster joins the group. Bards and sorcerers have a limited spell selection, so work with them to cover the gaps in their spell lists with your own selections. If there's a wizard or another wu jen in the group, there's no reason to stop at coordinating your daily spell selections -- you can also swap spells for your spellbooks.

Some Key Equipment

As a wu jen, your spells are more important to you than your gear, but a few pieces of the right gear can make your career longer and happier:

- **Spell Book:** This is the most critical piece of your gear. Guard it well, and keep a copy in a safe place. If you do much wilderness adventuring, you'll need to take your spellbook along with you so you can replenish the spells you use up. If you've accumulated a large number of spells, consider traveling with a backup spellbook that contains only the spells you use most often. This is called a traveling spellbook. If you lose it, you can replace it much more cheaply than your main spellbook.
- **Melee Weapon:** You're not much good in combat, but you never know when you'll have to resort to hand-to-hand combat. Carry a staff or a dagger, or both, so that you're not defenseless when your spells run out or fail.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack spell against some opponents. Use it when necessary to conserve your spells when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit magical attacks.
- **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells. And you never know when you'll need a particular spell and need it very badly. It pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve on a collection of scrolls, wands, or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry utility spells (such as *secret signs*, *rope trick*, or

minor creation) that you might not use every adventure. Best of all, you can make scrolls yourself (though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points). Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, especially attack spells such as *magic missile*, *rain of needles*, or *earthbolt*.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of **Dragon Magazine** for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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